

Florida puts Michael Tanzi to death in 11th US execution of 2025

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Florida put Michael Anthony Tanzi to death Tuesday, marking the third execution in the state and the 11th in the US so far this year. Tanzi, 48, was convicted and sentenced to death for the 2000 abduction, assault and murder of 49-year-old Jane Acosta. Republican Governor Ron DeSantis signed Tanzi's death warrant in March.

Attorneys for Tanzi unsuccessfully argued before the Florida Supreme Court that the state's lethal injection protocol would violate a constitutional ban on cruel and unusual punishment for the "morbidly obese" prisoner who suffered from chronic sciatica and other ailments. In a 23-page opinion, the state's highest court rejected Tanzi's claims "as untimely and meritless," stating that he had these medical conditions dating back to 2009.

The US Supreme Court declined to intervene without comment in Michael Tanzi's case, rejecting his last-minute request for a stay of execution.

About 50 anti-death penalty protesters held a vigil ahead of the execution at the Florida State Prison in Raiford, according to *Newsweek*. The group Floridians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty issued a statement that said in part "the death penalty is not justice," and that Florida was "selling a false bill of goods when it tells murder victims' family members that the death penalty is the best and only way to achieve justice."

"It is not justice to take a physically and mentally broken man, strap him to a gurney, and commit premeditated murder. This is revenge, plain and simple," the group said.

Tanzi's execution was scheduled for 6 p.m. local time. *Newsweek* reporter Joshua Rhett Miller, who witnessed the execution, said that witnesses viewed Tanzi in the execution chamber covered with a sheet with only his left arm exposed, where the chemicals to kill him would be injected into a vein.

Before the first drug was injected, which according to Florida's lethal injection protocol would be the sedative etomidate, Tanzi said in a final statement heard through a speaker in the witness area: "I want to apologize to the family of Janet Acosta and Caroline Holder for taking their

lives," Tanzi said, adding, "Heavenly Father, please do not blame those who do not know what they're doing."

Tanzi had confessed to the 1999 killing of Holder in Massachusetts, which does not have the death penalty. He never faced extradition for Holder's killing because of his death sentence in Florida.

He was then injected with the three-drug protocol. His chest heaved for about three minutes, then stopped. He did not respond to a prison officer who shook him by the shoulders and said his name loudly twice, according to the *Guardian*. He was pronounced dead at 6:12 p.m.

Tanzi confessed to the brutal kidnapping, sexual battery and murder of Acosta, a supervisor in the makeup department at the *Miami Herald*. Tanzi, then 23, attacked her as she sat in her van during her lunch break at the Japanese Garden on Watson Island, court records show. He promised not to kill her if she cooperated, then drove her, bound and gagged about 130 miles in her van to the Florida Keys, at one point sexually assaulting her.

Tanzi then killed her and dumped her body in a secluded area and then went on a shopping spree with her bank card. He was arrested two days later and pleaded guilty to first-degree murder and carjacking. He was sentenced to death in 2003 after the unanimous recommendation of a jury.

A childhood filled with abuse

Newsweek reports, "A physician who examined Tanzi following his arrest determined he suffered from bipolar mental disorder that had been undiagnosed since childhood, as well as substance abuse disorder, a sexual disorder and anti-personality disorder, court records show."

Tanzi's attorneys described his troubled childhood and abuse he faced from his father after the father was diagnosed with cancer. According to a friend, Tanzi's father once slammed the boy's head into the side of a truck. Tanzi's

mother said the abuse caused her son to become more disruptive, angry and troublesome, according to court records. After Tanzi's father died he was then sexually abused by a teenager.

Michael Sheedy, executive director of the Florida Conference of Catholic bishops, wrote in March 31 letter asking that Tanzi's life be spared:

Abused by his own father before being left fatherless at the age of eight, and sexually abused for the next five years, Mr. Tanzi's life was consequently severely disordered. ...

He became a chronic alcoholic due to being raised amid a family of alcoholism and sexual abuse, which drove him to act out sexually and turn to drugs and alcohol. This included drifting in and out of homeless shelters and institutions. He now credits prison with saving his life and takes full responsibility for his actions.

The "appearance of a serene death"

Florida's lethal injection protocol involves the administration of three drugs: etomidate, a sedative and anesthetic agent; rocuronium bromide, a paralytic; followed by potassium acetate, to induce cardiac arrest. Florida is the only state to use etomidate, a short-acting intravenous anesthetic agent and sedative, which it introduced without explanation in 2017 to replace the sedative midazolam.

"I believe there are problems with using etomidate, and major problems with the three-drug protocol," Maria Deliberato, executive director of Floridians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty and previous legal counsel for a federal lawsuit brought by death row prisoners, told the *Tampa Bay Times*.

She said that because the rocuronium bromide paralyzes the person, the prison executioners would not be able to tell if the sedative, etomidate, had worn off. The lawsuit argued that the paralytic only "create[s] the appearance of a serene death."

Deliberato told the newspaper that Florida laws prohibit such neuromuscular blocking agents from being used when euthanizing dogs or cats. "We don't put our animals down that way," she said.

A National Public Radio (NPR) analysis of 200 autopsies of prisoners executed by lethal injection showed that 84 percent showed evidence of pulmonary edema, a condition

in which a person's lungs fill with fluid, creating the sensation of suffocation or drowning similar to waterboarding.

The NPR findings of pulmonary edema were endemic to deaths by lethal injection regardless of the state where the execution was carried out, or the protocol employed. The autopsies showed pulmonary edema in lethal injections involving sodium thiopental, pentobarbital, midazolam and etomidate.

NPR said that doctors reviewing the autopsy findings "raised serious concerns that many inmates are not being properly anesthetized and are therefore feeling the suffocating and drowning sensation brought on by pulmonary edema." Froth and foam were found in many of the prisoners' lungs, indicating that they likely struggled to breathe as their lungs filled with fluid.

Since the nation's highest court reinstated the death penalty in 1976, Florida has executed 109 individuals, including two women and four foreign nationals. During this period, 30 of the 200 people wrongfully convicted, sentenced to death and subsequently exonerated have been Florida death row inmates, more than in any other state, according to the Death Penalty Information Center. Only six men have been granted clemency. Based on these figures, it is a near certainty that innocent people have been sent to their deaths.

Eleven people have been executed in the states that practice the death penalty so far in 2025, including three in Florida, with 14 more execution scheduled for the remainder of the year. The next execution is set for Friday, April 11, in South Carolina, where Mikal Mahdi, barring a last minute reprieve by Republican Governor Henry McMaster, will die by firing squad.



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